

## **UNITY IN DIVERSITY**

By Lupe Ayala MSW, Cultural Competency Committee Member and SA7 Liaison



Labor Day often marks the beginning of the school year, but also the observance of National Hispanic Heritage Month.

Americans observe National Hispanic Heritage Month from September 15th to October 15th, celebrating the histories, cultures and contributions of Latin Americans in the United States.

Latin American countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica gained their independence during this historic period, thus epitomizing the domino effect that took place in this region of the Americas. Consequently, September 15<sup>th</sup> became Latin American Independence Day, September 16<sup>th</sup> celebrated Mexican Independence Day, followed by Chilean Independence Day on September 18<sup>th</sup>.

To recognize the importance of the growing Hispanic population within the United States, on September 17, 1968, Public Law 90-498 authorized President Lyndon Johnson to annually establish a week in September inclusive of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> as National Hispanic Heritage Week. Later, Ronald Reagan expanded the week celebration to a full month. Americans and the the educational community in particular are summoned to recognize the achievements, customs and legacies of U. S. citizens with roots in Latin America. The month confirms that the United States "is a nation of communities... a brilliant diversity spread like stars... like a thousand points of light in a broad and peaceful sky," George Bush.

The people of these regions are from different racial groups, participate in traditions uniquely their own, speak different languages – Spanish, English, Nahuatl (Uto-Aztec language spoken by about 1.5 million people in Mexico) and other languages. They act according to the beliefs and customs of religious practices handed down by earlier generations. Given the diversity present in

Hispanics, it is important not to generalize about them but to celebrate their contributions and customs. Clinicians are reminded to have the clients explain their cultural heritage so that clinicians can more fully appreciate the client's world view.

National Hispanic Heritage Month exemplifies that "diversity in action and thought is like the experience of life itself – always changing, infinite in its variety, sometimes turbulent and all the more valuable for the accomplishments it brings to the United States," as said by Jimmy Carter.

Clearly, **Unity in Diversity** exists with the observance of National Hispanic Heritage Month.